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A schizoanalytical reading of the dynamics of the oedipal family in Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*

قراءة من خلال التحليل الفصامي لقوى العائلة النووية في رواية "التّصحيحات" للكاتب جونتان فرانزن

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Abstract:
The article studies the ideological influence of capitalism on the family in Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001). Relying on schizoanalysis, as an anti-oedipal analysis, it argues that the father internalizes the oedipalizing system of capitalism and inflicts it on the family members. As far as it trains its members on repression and self-deception, the Lambert family becomes a generator of the capitalist subjectivity. Moreover, because of the incompatibility between the oedipalizing regime of the nuclear family and the schizophrenic tendencies of late capitalism, the Lamberts experience a state of decentering leading to clinical depression and to the disintegration of the whole family.

Keywords: Family; Schizoanalysis; Anti-Oedipus; Capitalism; *The Corrections*; Franzen.

ملخص البحث

يدرس المقال التّأثير الإيديولوجي للرّأسمالية على الأسرة في رواية "التّصحيحات" (2001) للكاتب جونتان فرانزن. من خلال اعتماد التّحليل الفصامي كتحليل يتجاوز أوذيب، تؤكّد الدّراسة أنّ أب العائلة يتشرب نظام الكبت الرّأسمالي ويسقطه على أفراد عائلته، من خلال تنشئة أفرادها على الكبت والخداع النّفسي، تصبح عائلة لامبرت نواة للنظام الرأسمالي تنتج أفرادا منقادين له. إن غياب التّوافق بين الكبت النفسي النّاتج عن الأسرة النّووية والتّحرر الفصامي النّاتج عن الرّأسمالية الحديثة يجرّ عائلة لامبرت إلى حالة من التيهان والاكتئاب، ويؤدي إلى تفكك الأسرة بكاملها.

كلمات مفتاحية: أسرة، تّحليل فصامي، تجاوز أوذيب، أأسمالية، "التّصحيحات"، فرانزن.

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I. Introduction

Jonathan Franzen interlaces the representation of the nuclear family with a subtle critique of the hegemony of capitalism. The article examines the dynamics of the Lambert family as a nuclear unit in Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001) and their relation to the pervading principles of capitalism. It argues that the Lambert father learns Oedipus at work, and then imposes it on his family members participating in the promotion of the capitalist subjectivity.

While most critical studies about fictional families draw on psychoanalytical models of inter-familial relationships, namely the Freudian Oedipus complex, the actual study approaches the family from a historically informed perspective. It depends on schizoanalysis as developed by J. Deleuze and F. Guattari (2000). Being an "anti-Oedipal" analysis of the nuclear family, Schizoanalysis first questions the Freudian Oedipus that represses desire within a triad system of familial conflicts, and second it relates repression to the dynamics of the capitalist system. Capitalism, through inflicting upon the family its principles of individualism, repression, and alienation, turns the family into a vessel for its oedipalizing mechanisms.

II. The Nuclear Family as a Capitalist Institution: A Socio-Historical Context

A simple analysis of the development of the nuclear family reveals its relation to capitalism. Throughout history, the family kept developing into different forms and adopting various functions. J. L. Flandrin (1979) notes that the sense of close kinship–the father, the mother and the children–as the basis of the family did not appear until the seventeenth century in France and the eighteenth century in England (pp.7-8). Industrialization put an end to the stem family-the extended family that had a perennial character and enjoyed full ownership (Flandrin, 1979, p. 50). F. Engels (1972/1884) chronicles the development of kinship structures beginning from that of open-lineage in prehistory to the nuclear unity common in modern times. Remarkably, Engels argues that monogamy with restricted codes of fidelity developed with the prevalence of private property in contrast to common ownership in old

communities and the desire to keep family wealth in the hands of family members (p. 74). While "preindustrial families meshed closely with the community," in the sense that they were mainly extended families occupying a central role in the community, the modern family, with the advent of capitalism, is enclosed within defined boundaries aside from society (Hareven, 1992, p. 44).

The modern type of the nuclear family is related also to industrial capitalism. Industrialism plays a role in the privatization of the family insofar as the means of production were transferred from the household to private corporations. Responsibilities previously centered within the household, like economic production and social instructions, were relocated to other social institutions like factories and schools. This resulted in the structural isolation of the family from the kinship system (Lasch, 1977, p. 6). More importantly, the nuclear household was redefined by the specific task of consuming goods and services to carry on reproduction: "'Daddy' and 'Mummy' become the trustees for nourishing and developing the worker-child—'Me'" (Laurie & Stark, 2012, p. 23).

Shared among sociological studies about the family is the effect of the social and economic change on the family. This is especially clearer with the decoding tendency of late capitalism. R. Edwards (2009) remarks that the "economic rationality and consumer culture of late capitalism have invaded the domestic sphere, corrupting the way in which family relationships are understood and experienced" (p. 278). Since capitalism is a system constant decoding where "there is no code valid for all of society," the family as a social code fails to withstand the permanent "flows of the capital" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 33).

The emergent social order of late capitalism fostered schizophrenia—the tendency to break free from conventional codes. Building on Lacan's conception of schizophrenia as "the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language," F. Jameson (2001) concludes that "schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence" (pp. 29-30). Yet, Deleuze and Guattari's use of the schizophrenic experience to comment on the effects of capitalism on individual psychologies is a descriptive rather than a diagnostic one. For them, the schizoid person is a free person who does not surrender to the established social and cultural codes (of desire). The schizoid frees desire and the unconscious from the constraints of Oedipus.

Though not refuting psychoanalysis wholesale, Deleuze and Guattari's main discontent with Freudian psychoanalysis is the use of the mythical in the analysis of familial relationships, and the focus on the inter-familial relationships on the expense of external influences of culture and politics on the family. They oppose the reduction of every event in the family to infantile desires formed in the triangular family relationship (father, mother, and child). While psychoanalysis tends to universalize the nuclear structure, Deleuze and Guattari draw attention to the fact that the private family is the historical result of capitalist privatization. To claim that the family is influenced also by exterior forces means that the family is no longer the determinant of social relations as psychoanalysis holds. The relation is reversed; it is socio-economic relations of the capitalist logic that alters the dynamics of the nuclear family in a way that turns the latter into a capitalist institution serving the reproduction of the capitalist subjectivity. The nuclear family's triad of the Father-Mother-Child becomes the simulacrum of "Mister Capital, Madame Earth," and their child the Worker" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 264). Instead of the mythical Oedipus, Schizoanalysis argues that Oedipus is the result of repression exercised by capitalism on the father who takes it home.

The main mechanism through which capitalism forges a conductive subjectivity is alienation. The individual is confined into a private life that leads to alienation from the self, people around and from reality. One no longer has the ability to build a sufficient communication with other humans and is disconnected from the real world through the mirage of expectations floating around. Moreover, individuals are made to desire not what they essentially want but what the system wants them to desire. Capitalism's claim of individualism and privacy turns out to be a mere propaganda aiming to automate its subjects into identical versions of desiring machines. These desires function as a substitute for the lack of satisfying one's authentic desires. The result of the whole process is dehumanization. Emotions, fulfillment and pleasure satisfaction become mechanized processes that can be controlled and channeled in ways that ensure the persistence of capitalism. In its privatization, the nuclear family becomes a vulnerable institution to help reproduce these capitalist dynamics essentially through the rule of the parents.

III. The Lamberts' Reflection of the Oedipalizing Dynamics of Capitalism

Being a subtle critique of capitalism, *The Corrections* presents a world that is increasingly controlled by the power of capitalist corporations. These corporations define the relations between the Lambert members. The Midland Pacific Railroad loses power to Orfic Midland, causing Alfred's early retirement and the family's troublesome situation. Alfred's patent in Midland Pacific is bought by the Axon Corporation and used to Corecktall Process; a treatment Enid discovers in advertisement and manipulates Alfred to consume for his mental disorder. Chip Lambert teaches a module of "Consumer Narratives" in which he criticizes the manipulative powers of ads generated by W_Corporation and its role in enhancing consumerism. The same corporation is the one where Chip's brother and sister-in-law own a great deal of stock. It is also the same corporation to which Brian Callahan, the chief of Chip's sister, sells pieces of music to use in producing its ads.

The Lambert family is a private family. Privatization has not provided a haven for family members as far as the profit principles of the market alters the strongest bonds of kinship, care, and intimacy. For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari (2000) reject psychoanalysis' apprehension of the family as a closed oedipal triangulation:

> The father and the mother exist only as fragments, and are never organized into a figure or a structure able both to represent the unconscious, and to represent in it the various agents of collectivity; rather, they always shatter into fragments that come into contact with these agents, meet them face to face, square off with them, or settle the differences with them as in hand-to-hand combat. (p. 97)

The child's relation to his parents is not the only construct of the unconscious since both parents are reflective of the multi-social agents. The various elements of the family are always related to and directly perturbed by the elements of the political and historical situation that prove to be "more effective than everlasting Oedipus" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 97).

To better show how the psychodynamics of the modern American family are being determined by the forces of the capitalist system, Franzen follows a genealogical analysis of the Lamberts, concentrating on two different generations. There are the Lambert parents, who experienced both the anxious years of the Great Depression and the post-war industrial boom; and there are their children who want to live up to the new modes of life brought about by the transition of the United States to a post-industrial economy. Such generation gap prevails in contemporary American novels showing a movement from "thrift to expenditure, from the protestant work

ethic to an ethos of hedonistic consumerism, from the model of the self as an occluded privacy to that of therapeutic reconciliation" (Green, 2005, p. 106). Further illustrating this point, Franzen situates the Lambert family within two different environments, the Midwest and the East Coast. The movement of the urban sophisticated children to the East symbolizes their abandonment of the ideals associated with the Midwest and the Pilgrim Fathers such as family life and hard-work.

A Great-Gatsby-like figure, Alfred is a self-disciplined and a self-made man. He adopts the Franklinian work ethic of hard work, thrift and frugality. As a ruthless capitalist, Alfred is entirely devoted to his factory work—at the expense of family gatherings and parental affection. Alfred's character in the novel serves two roles. On one hand, he is the vessel in which the capitalist economy pours its 'oedipalizing' dynamics; on the other, he is the transmitter of these dynamics to the nuclear unit.

The capitalist system requires an obedient worker. According to E. Holland (2002), to enforce obedience on workers, the capitalist system forces workers to relinquish direct access to goods for fear of losing a job or a wage, and thus train them on self-denial. As a result, the workers are alienated from their real desires and unconsciously forced to adapt false ones to serve the commercial impulses of the system. Alfred is always straining to defy self-gratification. Moreover, he inflicts self-denial on his wife: "Anything that might have satisfied her he found a reason to withhold" (p. 279). Being constantly under the pressure of self-denial, the Lamberts live in perversion, "a serious imbalance between self-denial and self-realization" (Holland, 2002, p. 29). Alfred is portrayed as a beast in his relation to his wife, "one of the overly civilized predators you hear about in zoos, the Bengal tiger that forgets how to kill, the lion lazy with depression" (p. 242). Strangely, "to extract attraction, Enid had to be still, unbloody carcass" like inanimate resources (p. 242). Perversion in this case manifests in Alfred's masochistic acts and Enid's dehumanizing vulnerability.

When he is away from home because of work, Alfred lies at night awake on a mattress which he feels has catalogued "the faults of humanity" (p. 246). His repressed libido manifests in images of women trying to seduce him. However, "his eyes opening to Fort Wayne at sunrise…he had denied the succubuses his satisfaction" (p. 247). His persistent suspension of gratification generates anxiety. Before his retirement, Alfred used to divert his sense of alienation and anxiety to working hard. Deleuze and Guattari (2000) argue that "the subjective essence of desire and labor [is] a common

essence inasmuch as it is the activity of production in general … Capitalism [is] continually re-alienating this essence" (pp. 302-303). Capitalism alienates desire from labor and keeps them as two segregated domains. As a result, "in the routinized labor processes of capitalist civilization, the human body is 'desexualized,' and its libidinal or sexual energy is invested into performing well and getting the job done" (Kovacevic, 2007, p. 85). Alfred's "self-defeating stunt" (p. 153) shows his identification with the capitalist repression and readjustment of the need for self-fulfillment into a labor energy. H. Marcuse (1964) argues that the capitalist machine of social control substitute libido, the transcendental energy of the Life Instincts, by Eros, the mere physical acts of sexuality. The desublimation of the libido, in the view of Deleuze and Guattari (2000), is used through the nuclear family to serve the reproduction of the worker-consumer. Hard work provides Alfred with the pleasure of achievement and thus serves as a substitute to self-fulfillment.

Enid finds in the "blanket of self-deception" (p. 312) a substitute for her trampled right of gratification. For example, her refusal to admit that this was her husband, not "one of the men in uniform she ought to have married had slipped into her bed" (p. 243), saves her the dream of having a real intimate relationship. Enid's self-deception nurses submission to her atrocious exploitation which matches the capital exploitation of means of production. She retreats to many other fantasies: conceiving to hear her son Chip saying he works for Wall Street Journal instead of Warren Street Journal and informing all her neighbors about the prosperous writer he is to become; finding in pregnancy a sideway to feel and to show to her neighbors that she is not less fulfilled. When Alfred left for eleven days without kissing her goodbye, "her swelling womb, the pleasure of the fourth month, the time alone with her handsome boys, the envy of her neighbors all were colorful philters over which she's waved the wand of her imagination" (p. 250). Revenge is another substitute for Enid's self-gratification. The Dinner of Revenge consists of liver and pork that the cold husband does not like. Enid feels satisfied not only when Alfred takes her own revenge from Chip who refuses to eat, but also because she succeeds at killing the horrendous pride of her husband, who will be finally sorry at realizing what a beast he is, and that he is not a loving father as she is a loving mother.

The psychodynamics of the oedipal family reflect and reproduce the socio-economic dynamics of capitalism mainly through the child. The child (worker) is cut off from direct access to mother (goods) by the father (capital). The fear of castration (losing job or wage) forces obedience on the

child. The parents imprint self-denial, asceticism and subservience on the child's psyche. The Lambert father, for whom "fraternizing had always been a struggle" (p. 252), identifies with the boss role when dealing with his sons: "It was in their [Gary and Chip's] nature to throw their arms around him, but this nature had been corrected out of them. They stood and waited, like company subordinates, for the boss to speak" (p. 252). Trained into self-denial, Chip and Gary no longer throw their hands around their father.

With the separation of the family from other social institutions, children are deprived of proper adult role-models with which they can identify to develop strong and balanced personalities. The privatization of the family limits them to only two social role-models of the boss (the father) and the subordinate (the mother). E. Holland (2002) states:

> Within the confines of the nuclear family, children have two and only two adult figures with which to identify, and on which to model themselves: Daddy and Mommy—that is, the oppressor and the oppressed. Depriving children of any other adult role model prepares them to adopt one of these two standpoints in their later life—either of which effectively mirrors and reinforces a crucial stance in capital society: either become a boss, or submit to one. (p. 29)

Alfred and Enid's parental roles are decoded, or "stripped of their halo" to use Marx and Engels' description (2009/1848, p. 7). They have become reflectors of the power dialectics of the capitalist system, domination (Alfred) and subservience (Enid). These two polar positions inform also the consciousness of the Lambert children.

Under the dominating power of the Lambert father, the sons have no individuality to be developed. As subservient as his mother, Gary adheres to his father's despotism and becomes a shallow reflection of what the Lambert parents seek to see in their sons. He eats his dinner pretending to like rutabaga, converses with his mother about trivial topics while helping her clean the dishes and gives her fun time playing Ping-pong together. Moreover, out of pathos to seek his father's approval, Gary keeps showing off his abilities at mathematics and makes a jail with Popsicle sticks and an electric chair inside it. The child in fact has neither interest nor talent at constructing chairs and houses out of Popsicle sticks beyond winning the admiration of his father.

Chipper tries to oppose his father's domination, yet he gets 'castrated.' This happens at the "Dinner of Revenge" when the boy refuses to finish his food. Chip refuses submitting to rules on the expense of self-gratification.

The boy can fool his father through palming or secreting the liver he does not like in Gary's pragmatic way. But he refuses to imply to his father that he yielded to the orders. Because he craves self-fulfillment and autonomy, the boy is deprived of having dessert (goods) by the boss. Trying to attain authentic self-fulfillment instead of accepting substitutes, he ends being castrated. The fact that Chip is Alfred's most loved child, however, shows that the boy's individuality and rebellious spirit provide Alfred with a substitute for his own repressed personality. Chip's rejection of the adults' authority shows the desire to be an autonomous child rather than an obedient little adult. The attempts of the Lambert parents to suppress Chipper's individuality result in a feeling of futility that will be "a fixture of his life" (p. 266).

The Lamberts, as a nuclear unit, is the medium through which capitalism maintains its rule of oppression-repression. While psychoanalysis promotes the assertion that "the child is the father of the man," schizoanalysis holds that "Oedipus begins in the mind of the father" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 178). The father learns Oedipus from the boss. In *The Corrections*, Alfred internalizes the oedipalizing system of the Midland Pacific railroad and inflicts it on his family members.

IV. The Lamberts' Disorientation Under Late Capitalism

Having been raised under the rigid and repressive system of their parents, the Lambert sons experience confusion about the novelty of their actual social and cultural context. Gary and Chip suffer a state of schizophrenia featuring in a lack of an autonomous ego, disconnection from reality, alienation and anxiety. This is in contrast to the Lambert daughter, who though also escapes family life, leads her career successfully.

Neither the submissive nature of Gary nor the rebellious spirit of Chip allow either man to construct an autonomous self. Unable to free themselves from Oedipus, their life turns to be a mere negation of what their father wants. Gary, the investment banker, sets his life goal "not to be like his father" (p. 172) in profession, and in his choice not to work more than forty hours per week (p. 197), preferring instead to spend more leisure time with his family cooking mixed grill at home. Gary, as many fellow Americans, is subjected to the desires promoted by the market: "All around him, millions of newly minted American millionaires were engaged in the identical pursuit of feeling extraordinary_of buying the perfect Victorian, of skiing the virgin

slope, of knowing the chef personally, of locating the beach that had no footprints" (p. 197). Made to desire the same thing, the individuality of these Americans is annulled. As a result, Gary never experiences real satisfaction.

While Gary gives too much importance to eating at home together, his wife and sons "couldn't care less" (p. 166) preferring junk food, eating out or order-in meals. Gary laments that "togetherness and filiality and fraternity weren't valued the way they were when he was young" (p. 166). Values like family gatherings, cooking at home, and parental authority are decoded according to the new logic of soft and consumer capitalism. Gary's disconnection from reality prevents him from realizing that Caroline is a deeply involved mother, and successful at having "an emotionally healthy family" (p. 183).

Chip's main concern also is to differentiate himself from the fate of his family. The adult Chip proceeds with the revenge game: "Chip had had plenty of incentives to work hard and prove his parents wrong" (p. 33). While Enid wants him to be a doctor, and Alfred sees no point in literary theory, Chip has his Ph.D. in literary theory. Moreover, Chip's interest in postmodern cultural theory stands against Alfred's devotion to Schopenhauer's philosophy. Against his father's misogynistic tendencies also, Chip is "the only male professor in D_ history to have taught Theory of Feminism" (p. 45). Ironically, Chip is the most unsuccessful Lambert on all sides. He is a failed screenwriter and a fired Connecticut-College-Professor. Further, he lies to his parents about his unemployment and goes to Lithuania to defraud American investors.

Chip dwells on self-delusion feeling "secure in the knowledge that his parents could not have been more wrong about who he was" (p. 35). Making fun of Alfred during dinner parties provides Chip with a sense of self-fulfillment. Importantly, in the course of consumer narratives, Chip calls his students to rebel against the system that makes the father and castrates the son. However, Melissa harshly accuses the hardworking teacher of imposing his views on his students—much like his father used to do.

The result of disconnection from reality and lack of autonomy for both sons is alienation and anxiety. Gary experiences a state of schizophrenia and gets alienated in his family. When he fails to convince Caroline to spend "one last Christmas" in St. Jude and their sons ally with her, his sense of isolation deepens. Gary ends up a shouter like his father who is now depressed, but "who, in his prime, as a shouter, had so frightened young Gary" (p. 160). Shouting for both men is the result of anxiety at the lack of self-fulfillment

and the inability to connect to reality. Gary's life comes to be dominated by "persistent suspicion that Caroline and his two older sons were mocking him" (p. 139). His state of paranoia deepens by the belief that by offering him, as a birthday gift, a dark room in the basement where he can work on his "All-Time Lambert Two Hundred" album, Caroline wants to exile him from the house exactly like thirty years ago in St. Jude when Alfred has been isolated in the basement.

Chip's satisfaction neither by his parents' world of thrift nor the new world of consumerism and easygoing results in anxiety and disorientation. Though he criticizes the consumer incentives of the system, he falls nevertheless into consumerism. Melisa introduces him to Mexican A, a drug to intensify desire and alleviate shame, which Enid also will start using later on. The materialist culture of drug use reduces human experience, memory, and feelings to mere chemicals of the brain and stands in sharp contrast to the traditional ideals of self-autonomy and volition. The Lamberts basically fail to understand that pharmaceuticals cannot offer solutions for problems which are essentially problems of life and the way they live together as a family.

E. Holland (1999) argues that schizophrenics result from "the incompatibility between the dynamics of schizophrenia unleashed by capitalism and the reigning institutions of capitalist society including … the nuclear family" (p. 2). Against the family that is supposed to maintain social order and stability, the late capitalist condition promotes unlimited freedom and speed. The individual's consciousness becomes shattered between the demands of the private family and the nature of the capitalist progress that demands constant flux and erasure of borders. This is in line also with Jameson's (1991) notion of "schizophrenic decentering," which means the "insertion [of] individual subjects into a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities, whose frame range from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private life all the way to the unimaginable decentering of global capital itself" (p. 413). In their movement from the closed world of their upbringing to the disturbing life of the East Coast, the Lambert sons experience a sense of decentering, a profound feeling of disorientation.

In the case of the younger sister, however, things turn different. Denise, a successful chef in Philadelphia, does not experience disorientation; however, she turns against the sense of the family. When she has been still a fetus, Alfred has resolved to make his corrections with the last child: "From the day she was born he would treat her more gently than he'd treated Gary

and Chipper. Relax the law for her, indulge her outright" (p. 281). Denise finds atonement for her emotionally detached family in her work as a cook:

> A good crew was like an elective family in which everyone in the little hot world of the kitchen stood on equal footing, and every cook had weirdnesses concealed in her past or in his character, and even in the midst of the most sweaty togetherness each family member enjoyed privacy and autonomy: she loved this. (p. 378)

The crew in the hot world of the kitchen provides a substitute for Denise's lack of an affectionate family. It offers her the love, security and autonomy deprived of in her own family. Her work as a cook, her fascination with food and the kitchen in general are big parody of consumer capitalism. Denise does not suffer the confusion her brothers go through. Though she is disturbed by Enid's emphasis on traditional values, she is resolute to live her life the way she wants.

On the one hand, "Denise's work habits were simply evidence that she was her daddy's daughter" (p. 355); on the other and contrary to her brothers, she is not really confused about flouting the maxims of her father's discipline. Denise has been a "witness" to the stressful relation between her parents and the harm Alfred inflicted on her mother. So, "when she was older, she betrayed him" (p. 281). In addition to reflecting the counterculture of the age, her bisexuality, is a glaring announcement of a rebellion against her father's patriarchy and her mother's conservatism, and against the very sense of the family. She is not reluctant to declare "I hate family. I hate home. I'm ready to leave" (p. 508).

It is important to note that Denise has not gone through the oedipalization process, and this justifies why she does not experience the incompatibility between the codes of the nuclear family and the schizophrenic tendencies unleashed by late capitalism. Besides, she is a schizoid in the sense that she does not experience desire defined as lack. She is a nomad with productive desire and no repressed unconscious. Her character fits to Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) idea of schizophrenics who embody the anti-Oedipus forces: "forces that escape coding, scramble the codes, and flee in all directions: orphans (no daddy-mommy-me), atheists (no beliefs), and nomads (no habits, no territories)" (p. xxi). In short, Denise is the new subject that soft capitalism requires for its persistence.

V. Conclusion

Through the Lamberts, Franzen shows how capitalism strips the family of its essence as an emotional institution. The Lambert family, as much as the capitalist system that produces it, turns into a repressive institution preventing its members from attaining appropriate social roles. Trained on self-denial, the father identifies with the boss role. The subservient mother learns self-denial from her reticent husband and dwells on self-deception as a substitute for fulfillment. Both the repressive power of the boss-father and the resignation of the docile mother construct the psyche of the Lambert children. The contradiction between the oediplaizing dynamics of the nuclear family and the deterritorializing tendencies of late capitalism leads to The Lamberts' sense of decentering. The adult sons are castrated as schizophrenics, in this case not to be celebrated but to be treated as clinically sick persons (as psychoanalysis has always seen schizophrenics). The fact that Denise, the product of liberal capitalism, turns against the family proves that the latter cannot stand in front of the overwhelming powers of the capitalist machine.

Living in an age of schizophrenic decentering, where all social codes and beliefs are constantly altered by the forces of capitalism, trying to bring about corrections seems meaningless. Even Christmas, the season of miracles, brings disappointment as Gary and Chip start fighting at the dinner table. The disorder within the life of the Lamberts and the increasing detachment among them attest to the difficulty of constructing familial cohesion in a society based on capitalist ideologies.

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